

New Congress makes history

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Members of the House of Representatives on the GOP side raise their hands for the oath of office at the opening session of the 114th Congress, Tuesday, Jan. 6, 2015, on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. Photo: AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite

WASHINGTON — The new Congress began on Tuesday. It has the most women, African-Americans and Hispanics in history.

Nearly all the lawmakers are white. But Congress now has more lawmakers from other backgrounds. Senators and Representatives are the two groups that make up Congress, which makes the country's laws. A new Congress begins every two years. Lawmakers were voted in or out of Congress during the elections last November.

Women In The House And Senate

On Tuesday, a total of 107 women became lawmakers in the 114th Congress. There are now 87 women in the House of Representatives and 20 women in the Senate. Less than 100 years ago, the first woman was elected to Congress. Congress only had men before that. There have been only about 300 women who have ever served in Congress.

The number of women in the Senate stays the same, at 20. There are two new Republicans, Joni Ernst of Iowa and Shelly Moore Capito of West Virginia. Two female Democrats lost their Senate seats in the November elections. They were Kay Hagan of North Carolina and Mary Landrieu of Louisiana.

Democrats and Republicans both belong to political parties. Members of each party share the same ideas about running the government. They tend to vote in the same way.

African-Americans And Hispanics

African-Americans also made gains in the last election. The new Congress has 48 African-American lawmakers. There are 46 in the House and two in the Senate. The number of black lawmakers is up from 43 in the 113th Congress.

Representative Mia Love is from Utah. She became Congress' first female African-American Republican. This is the first time that Congress has male and female African-American lawmakers from both parties.

Republican Senator Tim Scott of South Carolina made history last November. He became the first African-American senator elected in the South in more than 100 years.

The 114th Congress has one more Hispanic lawmaker. There are now a total of 39 Hispanic lawmakers. Congress has 27 Democratic and 12 Republican Hispanic members. Thirty-six Hispanic lawmakers are in the House, and three are in the Senate.

The number of Asian-American and Pacific Islanders also increased by one. There are now 14 Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the new Congress.

Mostly Christian

Religion is one area where the new Congress has not changed. About 9 out of 10 lawmakers are Christian. Nearly 6 out of 10 lawmakers are Protestant. Three out of 10 lawmakers are Catholic, according to a new study.

Congress has a bigger fraction of Protestants and Catholics than the United States, as a whole. About half of American adults are Protestant. About 1 out of 5 is Catholic.

Congress is also out of step with the public in another way. One-fifth of all Americans say they do not belong to a religion. Only one member of the 114th Congress says she doesn't have a religion.